

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-12 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 622
INFO AMEMBASSY ROME
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 0662

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, SCUL, IS
SUBJECT: PROTESTANT CLERGY EXPRESS CONCERN OVER NEW ANTI-PRO-
SELYTIZING LAW

SUMMARY: A GROUP OF CONCERNED AMERICAN PROTESTANT CLERGYMEN
CALLED ON THE AMBASSADOR JANUARY 12 TO EXPRESS THEIR
CONCERN ABOUT THE PASSAGE OF A VAGUELY WORDED NEW CRIMINAL
LAW AMEDMENT OUTLAWING THE OFFERING OF BRIBES OR MATERIAL
BENEFITS AS INDUCEMENT TO CONVERSIONS. ALTHOUGH PROSE-
LYTIZING IS HARDLY A PROBLEM IN ISRAEL, THE NEW LAW
REFLECTS ORTHODOX RESENTMENT AGAINST THE PARTICIPATION
OF SMALL MESSIANIC JEWISH GROUPS IN CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND
SOCIAL ACTIVITIES. THE CHRISTIANS FEAR THAT THE LAW WILL
ENCOURAGE HARASSMENT OF CHRISTIANS BY ORTHODOX JEWISH
GROUPS. ISRAELIS, IN TURN, ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY
AWARE THAT THE ANTI-MISSIONARY INTENT OF THE LAW COULD
HURT THEIR INTERNATIONAL IMAGE. SOME JEWISH GROUPS,
PARTICULARLY THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE, ARE
BEGINNING TO COOPERATE WITH CHURCH LEADERS IN
JOINT EFFORTS TO CONSTRAIN THE POTENTIAL INTERNAL AND
INTERNATIONAL DAMAGES OF THIS LEGISLATION. DEPARTMENT
CAN ANTICIPATE RAPIDLY ESCALATING PUBLIC CONCERN
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IN THE U.S. ABOUT THE LAW. END SUMMARY.

1. A GROUP OF AMERICAN CLERGY REPRESENTING THE UNITED
CHRISTIAN COUNCIL IN ISRAEL CALLED ON THE AMBASSADOR
ON JANUARY 12 TO EXPRESS THEIR GRAVE CONCERN OVER
THE KNESSET'S PASSAGE ON DECEMBER 27 OF AN AMENDMENT
TO THE PENAL CODE ORDINANCE WHICH MAKES INDUCEMENT

OR ATTEMPTED INDUCEMENT TO RELIGIOUS CONVERSION BY OFFERING OR PROMISING MONEY, GIFTS, OR OTHER MATERIAL BENEFITS A CRIME PUNISHABLE BY FIVE YEARS IMPRISONMENT OR A FINE OF IL 50,000. SIMILARLY, A PERSON ACCEPTING SUCH BENEFITS AS INDUCEMENT TO CONVERT OR TO HAVE ANOTHER PERSON CONVERTED (SUCH AS PARENTS DIRECTING OR PERMITTING THE CONVERSION OF THEIR CHILDREN) IS SIMILARLY LIABLE TO IMPRISONMENT AND FINES. THE LAW WILL COME INTO FORCE IN APRIL 1978 AND THE MISSIONARIES HOPE TO USE THE INTERVENING TIME TO LOBBY FOR ITS ABOLITION OR AMENDMENT.

2. THE GROUP CITED THE EXPLANATORY COMMENTARY OF RABBI YEHUDA MEIR ABRAMOVITZ (MK-AGUDAT YISRAEL), THE SPONSOR OF THE LAW, AS PROOF OF ITS ANTI-CHRISTIAN INTENT OF EVENTUALLY ENDING ALL MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES IN ISRAEL. THEY WERE ALSO UPSET BY WHAT THEY SEE AS SLANDEROUS AND FALSE STATEMENTS VOICED AGAINST THE CHIRSTIAN MISSIONARIES DURING THE KNESSET DEBATE, ACCUSING THEM: A. OF HAVING ENTICED MEMBERS OF THE ISRAELI ARMED FORCES TO CONVERT; B. OF HAVING AIDED PERSONS TO EMIGRATE IN RETURN FOR CONVERSION; AND C. OF HAVING USED MONEY, JOB OFFERS AND OTHER MATERIAL INDUCEMENTS TO ENCOURAGE CONVERSIONS.

3. ALTHOUGH THE GROUP CALLING ON THE AMBASSADOR
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CONSISTED ONLY OF BAPTIST AND MENONITE MINISTERS, THEY SAID THAT THE CATHOLIC, ANGLICAN AND GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCHES WERE SIMILARLY UPSET BY THE LAW, FEARING THAT ITS LOOSE WORDING COULD BE USED BY JEWISH RELIGIOUS MILITANTS AS LICENSE TO PROVOKE INCIDENTS, TO ENCOURAGE POLICE INVESTIGATIONS AND HARASSMENT OF MISSIONARIES AND THEIR FAMILIES, AND TO HARASS ARAB CHRISTIANS IN PARTICULAR. THEY VIEW THE LAW AS A SERIOUS THREAT TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN ISRAEL AND SAY THAT THEY AND THEIR CHURCHES WILL MAKE THIS CONCERN KNOWN TO THE US GOVERNMENT, THE WHITE HOUSE, CONGRESS, AND THEIR CONGREGATIONS BACK HOME.

4. AT THIS TIME, HOWEVER, THE MISSIONARIES SAID THAT THEY DID NOT WANT TO UNLEASH AN ANTI-ISRAELI CAMPAIGN, BUT WOULD SEEK TO ENLIST ALL POSSIBLE MEANS, INCLUDING INTERNATIONAL LOBBYING TO PERSUADE THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT TO ANNUL OR AMEND THIS LEGISLATION. THEY ALSO WANTED TO STRESS THE POINT THAT THE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES WERE AMONG THE STRONGEST SUPPORTERS OF ISRAEL IN THE US BY WAY OF ILLUSTRATING THE

INTENSITY OF CHRISTIAN CONCERN THEY QUOTED THE
APOLSTOLIC VICAR OF THE LATIN CHURCH IN JERUSALEM
MSGR. HANNA KALDANY AS SAYING THAT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
VIEWS THIS LEGISLATION AS "FIRST STEP TOWARD
CHRISTINA PERSECUTION IN ISRAEL," AND THEN SPECULATED
THAT THE MATTER MAY BE RAISED BY THE POPE AT HIS
MEETING WITH FM DAYAN. THE GROUP SOUGHT THE AMBASSADOR'S
SYMPATHY, MORAL SUPPORT, AND ADVICE--BUT WAS NOT
ASKING FOR FORMAL INTERVENTION BY THE US GOVERNMENT
AT THIS TIME.

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 623
INFO AMEMBASSY ROME
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 0662
5. COMMENT: THE PASSEGE OF THE ANTI-PROSELYTIZING
LAW REFLECTS A PROFOUND AND TRADITIONAL JEWISH
ABHORENCE OF PROSELYTIZING SHARED BY BOTH RELIGIOUS
AND NON-RELIGIOUS PERSONS. THUS DESPITE THE FACT
THAT OPEN PROSLEYTIZING OR CONVERSION OF JEWS TO
CHRISTIANITY IS VERTUALLY NON-EXISTANT IN ISRAEL,
(WHILE A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF CONVERSIONS TO JUDAISM
OCCUR) AND NOTWITHSTANDING THAT PROBABLY AN ISRAELI
MAJORITY CONSIDERS THIS LAW AS UNNECESSARY AND
MISCHIEVOUS, THE LIKELIHOOD OF IT BEING ANNULLED
IS SMALL. THE LAW WAS ENACTED HURRIEDLY AND ALMOST
SURREPTITIIOUSLY IN LATE DECEMBER OVER THE VIGOROUS
OPPOSTHION OF SOME OUTSPOKEN MEMBERS OF THE KNESSET
LIKE AMNON RUBENSTEIN (DMC) AND SHULAMIT ALONI. THOUGH
TECHNICALLY A "PRIVATE MEMBER" BILL, IT RECEIVED
STRONG SUPPORT FROM LIKUD. RUBENSTEIN TOLD THE
AMBASSADOR THAT HE CONSIDERED THE WHOLE EPISODE
"SCANDALOUS." ALTHOUGH THE LAW OSTENSIBLY DEALS WITH THE
QUESTION OF BRIBERY AND CONVERSION, IT IS SO BROADLY
DRAWN THAT IT COULD CONCEIVABLY BE ENVOCKED AGAINST

TOTALLY INNOCENT ACTIVITIES BY CHRISTIAN MINISTERS,
SUCH AS INVITING JEWS TO SOCIAL GATHERINGS OR PRO-
VIDING EDUCATION FOR JEWISH CHILDREN IN MISSION SCHOOLS.
NO ACTUAL CONVERSION NEED TAKE PLACE. THE UNDERLYING
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MOTIVE REFLECTS THE RESENTMENT OF THE ORTHODOX COMMUNITY
NOT ONLY AGAINST CONVERSION, BUT MORE PARTICULARLY
AGAINST THE PARTICIPATION OF SMALL BUT CONSPICUOUS
GROUPS OF MESSIANIC JEWS IN CHRISTIAN SERVICES AND
COMMUNITY LIFE. MANY OF THESE PARTICIPANTS ARE YOUNG
PEOPLE COMING FROM ORTHODOX FAMILIES.

6. THE GOI IS INCREASINGLY BECOMING AWARE OF THE
POTENTIALLY HOSTILE REACTION WHICH THE LAW MAY
EVOKE ABROAD, ALTHOUGH THE CLERGYMEN HAVE HAD NO RESPONSE
TO TWO LETTERS THEY HAVE SENT TO THE PRIME MINISTER.
NOR HAVE THEY YET MET DIRECTLY WITH ANY MEMBER OF
THE CABINET. AMERICAN JEWISH REPRESENTATIVES IN
ISRAEL HAVE ALREADY BEGUN TO WORK WITH THE UNITED
CHRISTIAN COUNCIL AND OTHER LEADING CHRISTIAN
CLERGYMEN IN A JOINT EFFORT TO MINIMIZE THE DANGER
OF A PUBLIC RELIGIOUS CONFLICT. LEADING ISRAELI
LAWYERS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE INDICATED
THAT THE LAW WOULD BE APPLICABLE ONLY IN CLEAR AND
SPECIFIC CASES OF BRIBERY OR ATTEMPTED BRIBERY,
BUT THE MISSIONARIES ARE NOT REASSURED. HOWEVER, THEY
HAVE BEEN INVITED BY THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE
MINISTRY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS ISRAEL LIPPIN AND
THE MINISTRY DIRECTOR FOR CHRISTIAN AFFAIRS DAVID
ROSSIN TO SUBMIT A LIST OF QUESTIONS ON THE APPLICATION
AND INTERPRETATION OF THE LAW TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL.
HIS OFFICE, IN TURN, IS EXPECTED TO ISSUE ON THE
BASIS OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE AN OFFICIAL INTERPRETATION
OF THE SPECIFIC APPLICABILITY OF THE LAW.

7. THE AMBASSADOR TOLD THE GROUP THAT HE SHARED THEIR
CONCERN OVER THE POTENTIAL IMPACT AND USE OF THIS
LAW AND THAT HE WOULD DISCREETLY MAKE KNOWN THIS
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CONCERN TO GOI. HE ALSO ASSURED THE MINISTERS THAT
THE EMBASSY WAS ALWAYS READY TO BE HELPFUL SHOULD
AMERICAN MISSIONARIES SEEK US GOVERNMENT PROTECTION
AND ASSISTANCE.
LEWIS

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